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On December 10th of 2009 President Obama of the United States of America delivered a but controversial Nobel Peace Prize address about the requirements of “just war.” He gave the speech as the commander in chief of a nation stuck in not one but two deadliest wars of the 21st Century- Iraq and Afghanistan.

Understanding the impact of his speech nothing less than a vision of moral pragmatism for the conduct of war and peace in the modern age, President Obama delivered a clear and complex a statement on the subject. This paper will assess the President Obama’s statement according to Realism and Constructivism, two contrasting ways of thinking that predict the behavior of the current world differently . While a Realist would point out Obama’s emphasis on elimination self interest an ideal way of negotiating peace within the international system , conversely, a constructivist would explore the paradigm accumulated around the norm of violence as means of attaining harmony

President Obama expresses how self-interest dictated conflict to be a means to reach conclusions over disputes. The President explicitly claims that the thought of people coming together to “advance a common prosperity seemed unimaginable” (Obama). This way of thinking is in line with the realist school of thought that

competition is the driving factor behind hostility outlined by Hans J. Morgenthau who based his account of “international politics on human nature’s drive for power” (Nye 98). The fact that peoples were unwilling to come together to seek collective success, in a civil societal manner, shows the self-interest present in society at this time in history. Moreover the status-quo politics that is a cornerstone in realism is present here because of the opposition to change. The violent actions of those “resisting change” (Obama, 2013) is further evidence to show the realism was at play as there were attempts to put down any change to the system which relates to the “structural systematic theory” where there is similar identity among states (Nye 99). Hence from a realist lens, the lack of civil society and the status quo politics at play firmly indicate that self-interest had absorbed global society in the past.

Moreover, President Obama not only acknowledges that war is sometimes necessary to stop the evil acts of tormenters he also warned his spectators “we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes” instead of giving a fake illusion or promise to a “war to end all war.” Not only did he admit that the use of force is sometimes “not only necessary but morally justified” but also was very clear about the fact that that his role as head of state is first and foremost “to protect and defend” the United States. However, with this statement one must questions his objectives and point out that such assertions seem contradictory to his remarks regarding elimination of self-interest by all nations to achieve the greater good?

Conversely, in addition, a realist approach would also agree with President Obama’s reminder that “evil exists.” He accepted the possibility that fear of change and other sources brings insecurity which can lead to extreme actions, and that no one is

immune to such enticements . “For we are fallible,” he said, “We make mistakes, and fall victim to the temptation of pride and power, and sometimes evil.”

On the contrary, a constructive way of thinking would disagree with the Assertions and question the paradigm of violence. In giving a brief history of world peace, the fundamentals of constructivism are evident in Obama’s description of how a paradigm shift altered a previously rigid framework in global society. In the first three paragraphs from the excerpts, he indicates that disputes around the world were settled “through the sword and clash of armies” (Obama) and that no one knew or thought to try anything different. Such a notion aligns with constructivism in that the global framework concerning peace had ossified (Jackson and McDonald 109) to such an extent that violence and war were the sole means in attempting to settle disputes. Having used war time and time again throughout history to settle conflicts, it became ingrained as a global societal norm and thus the more it was used, the more embedded it became in the world. Obama makes note of the unwillingness for alteration to this framework in stating that violence greeted any attempts at peaceful movements and that a change in thinking only occurred after the “carnage of two world wars” (Obama). Critical constructivism examines how adjustments to a framework are made possible (Jackson & McDonald 113) and in this instance the occurrence of the two world wars is the factor in forcing a paradigm shift in the previously rigid framework. Thus from a constructivist perspective, the innumerable experiences of war in the world led to the formation of a rigid framework that saw violence as the only way in which to settle conflicts that was only to be modified after the devastation of the two world wars prompted a paradigm shift.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that President Barack Obama's speech concerning world peace when analyzed from a constructivist lens shows the prominence of foundations present in society and how experience shapes actions taken while a realist perspective shows the widespread self-interest in both the past and present.

But as a human and a citizen of the United States of America one must ask the President the question "the US spends hundreds of billions of dollars trying to gain peace through war. What if we spent even one tenth that amount on tangible gestures of friendship and assistance?"

References:

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